

## **ABSTRACT**

Title: Attendant Care for College Students with Physical Disabilities using Wheelchairs:

Transitional Issues and Experiences

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From preschool through the end of high school, accommodation and success rather than self-advocacy and student development are the predominant frameworks for students with physical disabilities. Many students with physical disabilities who use wheelchairs are assisted by their family members with daily life activities such as getting out of bed, showering, eating, dressing, and toileting. For most of these students college is the first time they will have to use his or her own voice. Once in college, the students are responsible for finding their own personal care. Students are challenged with becoming responsible for the process of hiring an attendant for themselves, taking the next step to becoming independent, and being socialized into a new environment. Many factors affect the transition and experiences from high school to college and for students with physical disabilities, that transition may involve attendant care.

The purpose of this study was to explore the transitional attendant care issues and experiences of college students with physical disabilities who use wheelchairs. A phenomenological approach grounded in qualitative methodology was used in this study. In a mid-sized public doctoral-granting Midwestern institution, twelve participants were interviewed

who were undergraduates with a physical disability using a wheelchair and having attendant care.

Seven themes emerged regarding transitional issues for students with attendant care: time management, preparing for attendant care, training attendants, first feelings, accepting responsibility, parental involvement, and financial considerations. Four themes emerged regarding their collegiate experiences: attendant care preferences, relationships with attendants, supportive friends, and characteristics of attendants. Recommendations for future studies, future researchers, student affairs educators, and future college students were provided.

While students with disabilities that use wheelchairs and attendant care have similar experiences with many other students, they also have experiences that are completely different than the average college freshman. It is important to understand the unique challenges this subpopulation of college students has, and what they can do, and not do, to meet those challenges. Students with disabilities that use a wheelchair and will use attendant care need to consider the implications of attendant care and plan ahead prior to coming to college.